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Title : MORTALITY OF A BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN (*TURSIOPS TRUNCATUS*) CHOKING ON A BLACK MARGATE (*ANISOTREMUS SRINAMENSIS*) IN PUERTO RICO

Category : Strandings

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Abstract : Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) are the second most commonly stranded marine mammal species in Puerto Rico. Thirty strandings of bottlenose dolphins have been reported from 1990 to June 2003. However little is known about bottlenose dolphin mortality factors and diet in the Caribbean. On 18 February 2002, a female bottlenose dolphin was found floating dead in San Juan Bay, on the north-central coast of Puerto Rico. The carcass was salvaged for post-mortem examination. The dolphin measured 259 cm in length and weighed 188 kg. External examination showed an animal in good body condition, and appeared to have been lactating. A small tumor was found in the liver. Remarkably, a 49.2-cm black margate (*Anisotremus surinamensis*) was observed protruding from the mouth of the dolphin, extending from the tip of the snout to the throat. The dolphin's throat was swollen, the larynx was dislodged from its position, and signs of agonal death (blood and froth) were observed in the larynx and nasal passage. Stomach contents and parasites were present in the mouth, most probably due to the animal trying to expel the fish and from vomiting. Stomach contents included black margate, striped mojarra (*Eugerres plumieri*) and yellow fin mojarra (*Gerres cinereus*). Cause of death was determined to be asphyxiation due to choking. This is the first record of a marine mammal mortality caused by choking on a natural prey-item in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.